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Committee on Conferences
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Agenda and programme of work for 2008

The agenda for the substantive session of 2008 of the Committee on Conferences was approved by the Committee at its organizational session, on 7 April 2008, on the basis of a draft agenda proposed by the Secretariat in document A/AC.172/2008/L.1. The approved agenda for the substantive session of 2008 is accordingly issued in the present document, together with annotations regarding the documentation, for the Committee's consideration in 2008. Information concerning the reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the utilization of conference services and other matters, regularly reported under the agenda item "Pattern of conferences", will again be included in one comprehensive report.

Agenda for the substantive session of 2008

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Calendar of conferences and meetings:
   (a) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243;
   (b) Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009.
3. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities:
   (a) Intersessional departures for 2008 and related matters;
   (b) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them;
   (c) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States;
   (d) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

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(e) Improved utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa.

4. Impact of the capital master plan, accelerated strategy IV, on meetings held at Headquarters and other issues during its implementation.

5. Progress in integrated global management.

6. Documentation and publication-related matters.

7. Translation- and interpretation-related matters:

(a) Recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services;

(b) Vacancy rate at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

(c) Succession planning;

(d) Quality of translation and interpretation, and performance measurement.

8. Organization of work.

9. Adoption of the report.

Annotations

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

2. Calendar of conferences and meetings

(a) Requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243

In paragraph 15 of its resolution 47/202 A, the General Assembly demanded that all subsidiary organs of the Assembly comply with the provisions of section I, paragraph 7, of its resolution 40/243, in which it had decided that no subsidiary organ of the Assembly would meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

In accordance with the procedure established by the Committee at its 1986 session and reaffirmed at its 1992 session, chairpersons of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly that wish to meet at Headquarters during the main part of the Assembly should submit their requests to the Chairperson of the Committee.

(b) Adoption of the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009

A draft revised calendar for 2009 will be submitted by the Secretariat to the Committee on Conferences at its substantive session of 2008.

The Committee will submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 2009.

3. Meetings management/improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

(a) Intersessional departures for 2008 and related matters

A compilation of such matters will be provided for inclusion in the report of the Committee.

(b) Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

In section II.A, paragraph 3, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly welcomed the steps taken by those bodies that have adjusted their programme of work in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources and requested the Committee on Conferences to continue consultations with the secretariats and bureaux of bodies that underutilize their conference-servicing resources.

The Secretariat will report on the outcome of consultations with the Statistics Division in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with regard to the utilization factor.

In section II.A, paragraph 7, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to take measures to improve the planning of conference resource allocations with a view to ensuring that the bodies entitled to meet "as required" receive adequate conference services. The Secretariat will report on the matter.

(c) Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

In section II.A, paragraph 5, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly recognized the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of the sessions of intergovernmental bodies and requested the Secretary-General to ensure that, as far as possible, all requests for conference services for the meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States are met. In paragraph 6, the Assembly noted that the percentage of meetings held by regional and other major groupings of Member States that were provided with interpretation services in the four main duty stations in 2006 had decreased to 76 per cent, as compared with 87 per cent in 2005. It expressed its concern about the difficulties experienced by Member States owing to the lack of conference services for some such meetings and requested the Secretary-General to continue to explore innovative ways to address this problem and to report thereon to the Assembly through the Committee on Conferences.

(d) Improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

In section II.A, paragraph 9, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly noted with satisfaction that, in accordance with several Assembly resolutions, including resolution 61/236, section II.A, paragraph 9, in conformity with the headquarters rule, all meetings of Nairobi-based United Nations bodies were held in Nairobi in 2006, but reiterated the need for vigilance in this respect, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-third session through the Committee on Conferences.

(e) Improved utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

In section II.A, paragraph 10, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly welcomed the increased promotional activities undertaken by the management of the United Nations conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa. As a result, a utilization rate of 60.13 per cent was recorded in 2006, a notable increase

over the 2005 rate of 42.23 per cent, while a further increased utilization rate of 75 per cent was recorded as at 31 May 2007.

In section II.A, paragraph 12, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to explore means to increase the utilization of the conference centre of the Economic Commission for Africa, bearing in mind the headquarters minimum operating security standards, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-third session.

4. Impact of the capital master plan, accelerated strategy IV, on meetings held at Headquarters and other issues during its implementation

In section II.B, paragraph 3, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly requested all meeting requesters and organizers to liaise closely with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management of the Secretariat on all matters related to the scheduling of meetings in order to allow maximum predictability in coordinating activities at Headquarters during the construction period.

In section II.B, paragraph 4, the General Assembly requested the Committee on Conferences to keep the matter under constant review and requested the Secretary-General to report regularly to the Committee on matters pertaining to the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations during the construction period.

In section II.B, paragraph 6, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide adequate information technology support for documentation services to ensure their seamless operation throughout the implementation of the capital master plan. In paragraph 7, the Assembly noted that during the implementation of the capital master plan, a part of the conference-servicing staff and information technology resources of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management will be temporarily relocated to a swing space and requested the Secretary-General to provide adequate support to ensure continued maintenance of the information technology facilities of the Department, implementation of the global information technology initiative and delivery of quality conference services.

The Secretariat will report on the above-mentioned and other aspects of the capital master plan.

5. Progress in integrated global management

In section III, paragraph 8, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to ensure that measures taken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to seek the evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them, as a key performance indicator of the Department, provide equal opportunities to Member States to present their evaluations in the six official languages of the United Nations and are in full compliance with relevant resolutions of the Assembly, and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly, through the Committee on Conferences, on progress made in this regard. In paragraph 9, the Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue to explore best practices and techniques in client satisfaction evaluations and to report on a regular basis to the Assembly on the results achieved.

In section III, paragraph 10, the General Assembly welcomed the efforts made by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to seek the evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them and requested the Secretary-General to continue to explore innovative ways to systematically capture and analyse feedback from Member States and committee chairpersons and secretaries on the quality of conference services, and to report thereon to the Assembly through the Committee on Conferences.

In section III, paragraph 11, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to keep the Assembly apprised of progress made in integrated global management.

6. Documentation and publication-related matters

In section IV, paragraph 9, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly noted with concern the continued high level of late submission of documentation by author departments, which, in turn, has a negative impact on the functioning of intergovernmental bodies, and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its sixty-third session, through the Committee on Conferences, on impediments, if any, to achieving full compliance with the 10-week and 6-week rules for the issuance of pre-session documents, including, where appropriate, proposed measures to address such impediments.

7. Translation- and interpretation-related matters

(a) Recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services

In section V, paragraph 4, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly requested the Office of Internal Oversight Services to conduct a comprehensive review of the existing special arrangements governing the recruitment of temporary assistance staff in the language services at the four main duty stations, in particular as regards their compliance with relevant staff regulations and rules and Assembly mandates in the field of human resources management, and to submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-third session through the Committee on Conferences.

(b) Vacancy rate at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

In section V, paragraph 5, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly expressed continued concern at the high vacancy rate in the interpretation and translation services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, especially the chronic difficulty in staffing the Arabic Interpretation Unit, and requested the Secretary-General to address this as a matter of priority through, inter alia, assistance from Member States in advertising and facilitating the conduct of competitive examinations to fill these language vacancies.

In section V, paragraph 6, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to hold competitive examinations for the recruitment of language staff sufficiently in advance so as to fill current and future vacancies in the language services in a timely manner, bearing in mind the persistent situation at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, and to inform the General Assembly at its sixty-third session of efforts in this regard.

In section V, paragraph 7, the General Assembly noted with appreciation the measures taken by the Secretariat to fill current and future vacancies at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and requested the Secretary-General to consider further

measures aimed at decreasing the vacancy rates in Nairobi as an exceptional case and to inform the Assembly at its sixty-third session of efforts in this regard.

(c) Succession planning

In section V, paragraph 9, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly noted the challenges presented by the demographic situation in the language services, as described in paragraphs 87 to 89 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/161 and Corr.1 and 2), and requested the Secretary-General to take the measures necessary to avoid any negative impact on the quality of translation and interpretation and to report thereon, as appropriate.

(d) Quality of translation and interpretation, and performance measurement

In section V, paragraph 10, of its resolution 62/225, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to seek evaluation by Member States of the quality of the conference services provided to them, including through the language-specific informational meetings held twice a year, and to ensure that such measures provide equal opportunities to Member States to present their evaluations in the six official languages of the United Nations and are in full compliance with the relevant resolutions of the Assembly.

In section V, paragraph 11, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to improve the accuracy of translation of documents into the official languages, giving particular significance to the quality of translation.

In section V, paragraph 12, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to take the steps necessary to enhance translation quality in all official languages, in particular for contractual translation, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-third session. In paragraph 16, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its sixty-third session on the experience, lessons learned and best practices of the main duty stations in performing quality control of contractual translations, including on requirements relating to the number and appropriate level of the staff needed to carry out this function.

In section V, paragraph 14, the General Assembly noted the performance measurement matrix proposed by the Secretary-General in response to the request to develop a comprehensive methodology for performance measurement and management from a full-system perspective, and looked forward to receiving the indicators for all duty stations beginning in 2008.

In section V, paragraph 15, the General Assembly took note of the information contained in paragraphs 99 and 100 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/62/161 and Corr.1 and 2) on the impact of freelance recruitment on the quality of interpretation at all duty stations, welcomed the measures proposed in this regard and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly on the issue at its sixty-third session through the Committee on Conferences.

8. Organization of work

In section II.A, paragraph 20, of its resolution 57/283 B, the General Assembly encouraged the Committee on Conferences to keep under continued review the procedures for the participation of observers in the work of the Committee.

9. Adoption of the report